



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

February 20, 2013

Statement of Michael J. Brandi, Executive Director & General Counsel

Good Afternoon, Senator Harp, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Michael Brandi, the Executive Director and General Counsel of the State Elections Enforcement Commission.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee today concerning the State Elections Enforcement Commission's budget. This is an unusual year in that there are two budgets for Elections Enforcement: our requested budget that was submitted to the Legislature, and the Governor's budget proposal for Elections Enforcement.

As an initial matter, I would like to address the budget requested by Elections Enforcement. You should know that it was based on current services, with only slight amendments to meet our needs. In 2011, as you may recall, Elections Enforcement sustained staffing and budget cuts of forty percent.

Despite the substantial cuts sustained by the agency, we managed to continue to provide the exemplary programs and services to our regulated community and public throughout the past election cycles. We accomplished this by creative management of resources, increased training of our skilled staff, the efficient use and expansion of information technology, legislative changes and effective communication with our regulated community; we managed to meet our mandate even with these drastic cuts. Without the full and enthusiastic cooperation of our staff, we would not have been able to meet our statutory mandate. They have gone above and beyond to ensure that this crucial watchdog agency has been able to serve the public good even in the face of such dire economic times.

In 2012, the Commission approved 271 CEP grants during the Program's third run. Once again, the CEP was an unmitigated success and continues to achieve its mission of tempering the influence of special interest money in our elections. This success was partially due to the two vital accounts examiner positions this body restored. I would like to, again, thank you for recognizing our unique needs and restoring these positions -- thus ensuring that we were able to continue to meet our mandates in this past election cycle.

Thanks to the budgetary protection provided by the Legislature, Elections Enforcement has worked diligently to recreate itself, to enable its staff to do more with less.

- We redesigned our grant review processes and information retention to streamline them through more efficient use of technology.
- We redesigned our organizational charts to ensure that every hour of every day each position is fully used. Each unit at Elections Enforcement is intertwined to ensure maximum functionality and efficiencies. For example, in addition to disbursing grant funds, we trained our fiscal staff to both assist with the grant application in-take process and to help prepare statutorily mandated CEP reports necessary to ensure that the Fund is sufficient and the Program is successful. They have thus become an even more vital part of our CEP administrative team.
- We proposed and saw passed legislative changes that adjusted for the CEP grant application deadlines. These minimal but important changes, combined with large scale communication efforts by our compliance & public finance staff, drastically reduced overtime costs.
- We added new, voluntary financial filings during the CEP grant application period. This allowed staff review of qualifying contributions to be conducted over a longer period of time with greater positive communication and interaction between our elections officers and campaign staffs -- thus reducing continuances in the grant process.

In 2011, we were on the front-line of the budget reductions -- sustaining approximately 40% cuts to our budget and our staffing. But, we met this challenge

head on and ultimately succeeded. We have continued to meet our mission and have fully cooperated during this fiscal crisis. Each time the Governor's office has requested concessions, we have participated in give-backs and voluntary cuts. Following the approval of the December deficit mitigation plan, and at the Governor's request, we rolled these givebacks forward into our proposed budget as much as possible while still ensuring we will be adequately funded to meet administrative needs during the upcoming State-wide election year.

We fully recognize that these are drastic times and the State faces extremely difficult decisions. As we move forward it will be necessary to continue making changes that will save money. Change for change's sake, or worse yet, ill-considered changes that lead to increased bureaucracy and an inability to deliver services, should be avoided at all costs. Connecticut simply cannot afford such mistakes at this time.

As the Executive Director of Elections Enforcement, which has been undertaking continuous streamlining efforts – even before the Governor's proposal -- I am here to offer our experience and the lessons we have learned about what works and what doesn't. A person trained in an area of law who deals in that area every day does not have to research as many issues. Questions can be answered more quickly and with consistency. That is why people paying private attorneys by the hour rely on specialists to resolve their issues.

Our enforcement attorneys are specialists. That is what makes them effective. Specialized attorneys familiar with the intricacies of the law are better prepared to see patterns develop which in turn allows us to quickly and efficiently address respondents and resolve cases.

Through diligent oversight and management and through specialization and focus, we have been able to ensure that our response to cases is proportional to the violation with an emphasis on compliance through cooperation.

I would like to share some observations regarding our operations. We can only meet our mission by continuing to coordinate efforts between our internal units. The IT unit worked with the compliance and public finance unit to implement pre-

application grant reviews this year. These voluntary filings allowed our staff to review qualifying contributions throughout the grant season prior to an actual application being filed by a candidate. Our staff regularly communicated with campaign treasurers, which reduced continuances. This innovation wouldn't have worked without the outreach and education done by the compliance & public financing unit, and without the excellent customer service provided by our eCRIS helpdesk.

Our Commission is strongly opposed to the Governor's proposal as it destroys the ability of Elections Enforcement to serve as the repository for campaign finance filings; to perform independent investigations and enforcement; and to administer the Citizens' Election Program (CEP) in a non-partisan fashion.

In discussing these massive structural changes proposed by the Governor, there are virtually no savings that result from them. Our response times, communications with campaigns, education and outreach programs, and grant funding would be detrimentally impacted.

We do believe that there may be additional, creative ways to save money and find efficiencies without destroying the independence of the watchdogs - who we are and what we do. We would very much like the opportunity to discuss with you these options during future hearings with the Committee.

Thank you for your consideration of these critical matters. I look forward to working with you and will be happy to field any questions now.

